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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 001791

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DEPT FOR SA/FO, S/CT, SA/A  
NSC FOR AHARRIMAN, KAMEND  
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SUBJECT: AFGHAN PARLIAMENT APPROVES 20 OF 25 MINISTERS

REF: KABUL 1440

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ANGUS SIMMONS FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY. On Thursday, April 20, the Afghan National Assembly approved the majority of President Karzai's nominated Cabinet Ministers. Significant confirmations included Engineer Zarar as Minister of Interior and Spanta as Minister of Foreign Affairs. Minister of Culture Raheen and Minister of Economy Farhang were rejected, along with three newly proposed Ministers - the nominees for Commerce, Transport and Women's Affairs. The confirmations showed that despite criticism over many of the proposed ministers, the Karzai administration was nonetheless able to win a significant victory. END SUMMARY.

APPROVED MINISTERS

12. (U) The following Ministers were confirmed by the Wolesi Jirga (lower house of parliament), with the following vote tallies (number voting for, against, abstaining, and invalid ballots):

Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Rangin Dadfar SPANTA (150-75-15-5)  
Minister of Defense General Abdul Rahim WARDAK (166-62-15)  
Minister of Interior Engineer ZARAR Ahmad Muqbal (185-51-8-1)  
Minister of Finance Dr. Anwar ul-Haq AHADI (168-66-8-1)  
Minister of Justice Mohammad Sarwar DANESH (166-63-15)  
Minister of Education Mohammed Hanif ATMAR (185-47-11)  
Minister of Higher Education Dr. Mohammad Azam DADFAR (146-81-17-1)  
Minister of Energy ISMAIL KHAN (133-90-19-2)  
Minister of Haj and Endowments Professor Neyamatullah SHAHRANI (145-84-14-1)  
Minister of Public Works Dr. Suhrab Ali SAFARI (133-96-15)  
Minister of Health Dr. Sayed Mohammad Amin FATEMI (217-24-3)  
Minister of Agriculture Obaidullah RAMIN (178-58-8)  
Minister of Mines Engineer Ibrahim ADEL (128-95-18-3)

Minister of Communication Amirzai SANGIN (120-108-16)  
Minister of Rural Development Ehsan ZIA (206-27-11)  
Minister of Disabled and Martyrs Noor Mohammad QARQIN  
(194-41-9)  
Minister of Refugees Akbar AKBAR (118-102-23-1)  
Minister of Border Affairs Mohammad Karim BRAHAWI  
(176-55-12-1)  
Minister of Urban Development Engineer Mohammad Yusuf PASHTUN  
(122-106-14-2)  
Minister of Counternarcotics Engineer Habibullah QADERI  
(135-95-12-2)

13. (C) COMMENT. The size of the vote Zarar received to become Minister of Interior was a surprise. Zarar's nomination had been in jeopardy, as several prominent Tajiks (including Vice President Zia Masoud) had initially deemed him "weak" and unqualified. His high vote tally likely reflects the vigorous campaign launched to ensure his confirmation. Spanta's nomination to the MFA post had also initially been shaky, but the favorable impression he made during his speech before parliament (emphasizing his religious beliefs as well as his ideas for receiving guidance from parliament) is believed to have helped him win confirmation. At a meeting on election day at MOI attended by Zarar and Wardak, POLOFF noted that Zarar seemed very confident that he would succeed. As the two nominated Ministers watched the vote tally on television, they breathed a visible sigh of relief after the first Minister (Spanta) was confirmed. END COMMENT.

#### REJECTED MINISTERS

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14. (U) The following Ministers were rejected:

Minister of Youth and Culture Dr. Sayed Makhdoun RAHEEN  
(93-131-19-1)  
Minister of Economy Dr. Mir Mohammad Amin FARHANG (60-154-30)  
Minister of Commerce Dr. Mohammad Haidar REZA (99-123-22)  
Minister of Transport Gul Hussein AHMADI (105-116-20-3)  
Minister of Women's Affairs Dr. Suraya Raheem SABRANG  
(98-128-16)

15. (C) COMMENT. Minister Raheen's rejection may be the result of two factors: his refusal to woo the MPs (he reportedly stated, "if Parliamentarians want to vote for me, they will vote for me," although he did renounce his US citizenship to qualify for the position), and the conservative bent of Parliament. Conservative MPs raised numerous objections to Raheen's relatively moderate stance on television content and other cultural issues during questioning, and likely formed the core of opposition to him. Raheen and Minister of Economy Farhang are both closely associated to the aged ex-king and current "Father of the Nation" who occupies a wing of the Presidential palace in Kabul. Nominated Minister of Commerce Haidar Reza established a good reputation during his tenure as a Deputy Minister at MFA, but was criticized by MPs for not having experience in an economic field. Reza talked extensively about his faith and links to the jihad (he was Ahmad Shah Massoud's personal physician) in his time before Parliament, and was the only Panjshiri nominated to the Cabinet. Nominated Minister of Transport Ahmadi is Mohaqqueq's brother-in-law, and Mohaqqueq evidently was not able to muster enough votes to support his candidate. This may have been the result of Hazara displeasure with Mohaqqueq for his support of Sayyof during the Speaker election in December. Nominated MOWA Minister Sabrang had failed to inspire any strong feeling among the women MPs, and may have faced opposition from conservatives objecting to any woman as Minister. She also reputedly has bad relations with many of the women personnel in the MOWA. Of the five rejected Ministers, four are Tajik and one Hazara. END COMMENT.

## PROCESS/NEXT STEPS

¶6. (SBU) The full course of voting and tallying the votes was televised live. It began at 9:30 in the morning and finally finished at 7:30 in the evening. MPs were given 25 ballots showing a picture of each minister, his name and position. After being given time to vote (while sitting at their assigned chairs in the Wolesi Jirga assembly room), they were called one by one to put each ballot in the appropriate 25 boxes ranged in front of the room. It was a busy scene, with MPs continuing to talk to one another during the process and making incessant use of their cell phones, but it was also very orderly. The clear plastic ballot boxes were opened one by one, and the cameras zoomed in as ballots were removed, held up to view and counted aloud one by one. It was as open a procedure as anyone could wish.

¶7. (SBU) One procedural difficulty occurred during the vote on Minister of Communication Sangin, when the very close confirmation vote was questioned by several delegates who claimed that the abstentions meant he had not received a majority of the votes of those present. This was over-ruled by a rules read-out from the Acting Secretary General of the Parliament Secretariat and then by the Deputy Speaker, Arif Noorzai, following telephone guidance from Speaker Qanooni. The confirmation of Akbar, Sayyaf's candidate to become Minister of Refugees, who also failed to get an absolute majority of all votes cast, sparked heated debate in the Wolesi Jirga (lower house of Parliament), with Tajik MPs complaining that no Pashtun Minister was rejected.

¶8. (SBU) As far as actual transition time for newly-appointed

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Cabinet Ministers is concerned, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah told Charge in a meeting that it will likely take several days for the paperwork and logistics of transition to the new Minister to take place. Karzai will now need to nominate new ministers in place of those rejected, but it is not clear when this will happen.

## COMMENT

¶9. (C) Because the actual balloting was done in secret, it is almost impossible to tell who really voted for whom. Speculation will be rife over the coming days, as will claims of bribery and promises of favors to MPs and their friends by the various supporters of particular ministers, but the pattern will only emerge over time as sub-Ministerial positions and provincial offices are filled by the new Ministers. Afghans are masters of bargaining, and the past weeks have seen incessant maneuvering, constant parties, dinners and private meetings involving the ministers and the MPs. At each such event attended by POLOFFs, the MPs' mobile phones rang constantly, and the mix of politicians talking and meeting with others of diverse ethnic, regional and political backgrounds made it very clear that this would be a complicated process. All in all, however, the results show that the Karzai administration was able to get the majority of its first team of ministers selected, especially the line ministries. What is not clear is how large the cost to Karzai will be or how many promises he and the various ministers have had to make. END COMMENT.

Norland